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TAGS: [SMIG](#) [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [LA](#) [VM](#) [XC](#)

SUBJECT: AUTHORITIES IN NORTHERN LAOS WORRIED ABOUT HMONG
IMMIGRATION

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Mary Grace McGeehan for Reason 1.
4 (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Vietnamese Hmong immigrants are resettling in northeastern Laos from Vietnam and are becoming a growing concern among local authorities trying to control one of Laos' most remote borders. The Government of Laos (GOL) has repatriated some recent arrivals but appears to lack the capacity to undertake more than limited efforts. The Vietnamese Hmong are reportedly immigrating because of tighter Vietnamese enforcement of laws prohibiting opium cultivation and improving economic conditions in areas where donors are active on the Lao side of the border. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Project staff in the Lao American Project (LAP) in Laos' Luang Prabang Province reported that ethnic Hmong are continuing to immigrate into Laos from northwestern Vietnam, particularly from the region near Dienbienphu. The staff claim that as many as 40 Hmong families have recently settled in Viangkhamb District LAP villages alone, on average two to three additional households per village. Viangkhamb is in northern Luang Prabang and borders Vietnam. This immigration is part of a larger movement of Hmong from Vietnam into northeastern Laos, especially the northern districts of Luang Prabang Province and the eastern districts of Phongsaly Province.

¶3. (C) LAP staff said that military personnel stationed in border districts found the influx of Vietnamese Hmong difficult to control. The project staff reported that they can no longer travel to some border areas populated by ethnic Hmong from Vietnam because of language barriers and security fears arising from the sometimes aggressive behavior of the immigrants. Lao authorities have begun to repatriate some of the Vietnamese Hmong back to Vietnam via the international checkpoint at Taichang, but it appears that they are the unlucky few in the midst of a much larger migration. Post has no reliable statistics on Hmong immigration in this area, and it is doubtful that the GOL does either.

¶4. (C) The primary motivation for Hmong immigration into Laos appears to be a desire to escape stricter controls imposed by the Vietnamese Government since 2000, especially with regard to the cultivation of opium. The Hmong immigrants seem to believe that law enforcement is weaker in northern Laos, and they are probably correct. The Vietnamese Hmong settling in Laos were also attracted by reports from

their relatives already here that expanding development in donor-assisted districts offered better economic opportunities.

15. (C) Comment: The issue of Vietnamese Hmong immigration into Laos is a particularly sensitive one for the GOL, both because of the turbulent history of Lao-Hmong relations domestically, and because rapid population growth in upland areas threatens to make the ethnic Lao a minority in their country. These Vietnamese Hmong immigrants will do little to endear themselves to their new hosts if the primary purpose of their migration is to cultivate opium or share in the benefits of development intended for Lao citizens. End Comment.
MCGEEHAN